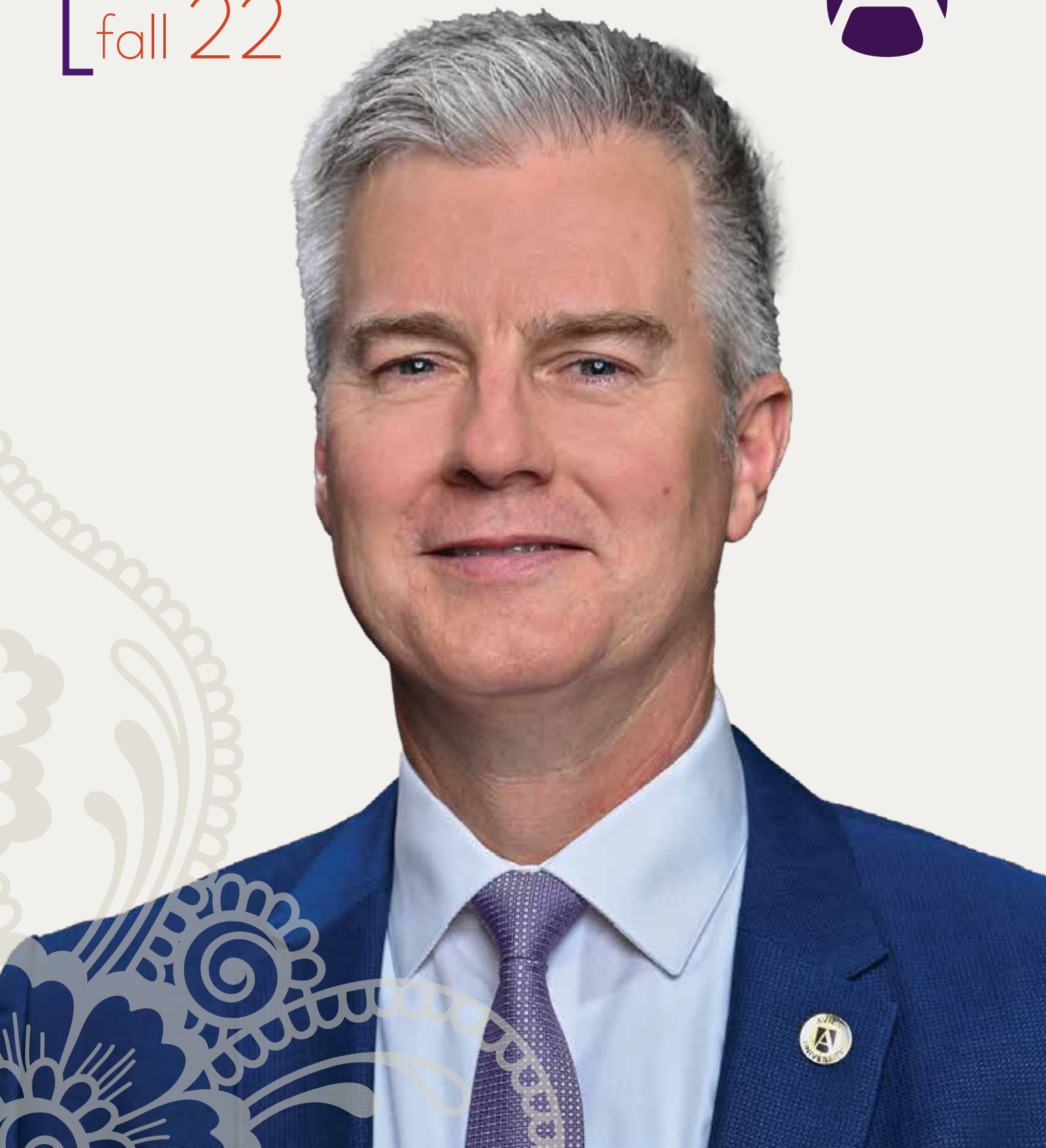


Alumni Magazine

# AVILA

fall 22



Alumni Magazine

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**W**elcome to the new issue of Avila magazine. We've redesigned the magazine to provide more Avila stories and updates on your classmates, all in a more reader-friendly format. Longer articles, like our cover feature on Avila's 15th President, Jim Burkee, Ph.D., include a QR code you can scan with your phone to read the entire story online. QR codes are also used to link to videos and other extended story content.

We hope you like the new magazine and look forward to hearing your thoughts and story ideas for future issues. Just scan this QR code and let us know what you think.

– Editor



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**First, please tell us a little about each of you!**

**Jim:** We all discover at one point, later in life, that we are the culmination of diverse experiences, often shaped by those who have most impacted our lives. This is certainly the case with both me and Hanen.

I grew up in a working-class suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin - home to a large family (I am the eldest of 29 cousins on my father's side). My dad dropped out of high school to go to Vietnam. My dad was a smart man and a hard worker, earning his GED, then working his way up through a steel company that manufactured lock washers and cotter pins. He was killed in an auto accident when I was a child, leaving my mother to raise my sisters and me. She is a remarkable woman, my mother - raising three of us alone on public assistance and through work as a church secretary before developing her own career path as an office worker and eventual manager at an auto dealership. A woman of deep and profound faith, she instilled in each of us that chief value.

She also drove me hard to go to college - and never stopped. In 1995 I applied to several top graduate

programs and was awarded a fellowship at Northwestern University. It changed my life. From there, I taught at colleges and universities in Wisconsin and New York, learning from some exceptional colleagues and leaders. Most recently, I served as a Vice President at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, founded by the Sisters of Charity, and sharing a mission much like that of Avila University - and shaped by my own history as a first-generation college student.

“

There is so much about Avila to love.

— Jim Burkee, Ph.D.  
President and Professor of History



Right: In April, President-elect Burkee and Hanen were in Washington D.C., seeking opportunities to expand access to international students meeting with the Ambassador to the United States from Tunisia, Hanene Tajouri Bassassi.



# [ Jim & Hanen Burkee

**Hanen:** I come from a city in southern Tunisia called Gabes. My father was from a working-class family, and my mother, Zohra, was a high school guidance counselor. She pushed me and my siblings to go to college. I studied English in my undergraduate and dreamed of studying abroad. In my senior year, I competed nationally and won one of five scholarships sponsored by the State Department to study in the United States, where I completed graduate studies and a Master's degree in political science. Now, I am pursuing my Ph.D. at the University of Arizona.



# [Jim & Hanen Burkee, cont'd]

## What about Avila sparked an interest in you?

**Jim:** There is so much about Avila to love. Its long and rich history, its championing of women's leadership, its charisma - rooted in its founding by the CSJ - of loving God through service to the dear neighbor.

**Hanen:** Our lives were transformed by higher education, Jim is a first-generation student, and I am an aspiring international student. Finding that same passion for underserved communities and first-generation students at Avila made it an instant match. We knew after our first visit that we were home!

**Jim:** It didn't take long to discover that Avila's people - its faculty, students, and staff - are equally special and share a commitment to underserved students.

## What are your short and long-term goals for the future of Avila?

**Jim:** The short-term goals are pretty straightforward: Avila needs to be bigger and stronger - with more enrollments and financial strength so we can make an even bigger impact in the Kansas City community. I'd also like to see us better define our mission and identity around what I believe Avila is and has already become - a university rooted in the CSJ values of service to the dear neighbor which truly cares for first-generation, underserved, and immigrant students and dedicates itself to transforming Kansas City through these transformed lives.

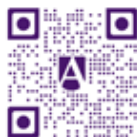
## How do you see yourselves melding and supporting the Avila and KC communities?

**Jim:** Expect to see us out and about in the community.

**Hanen:** We love people, so a big part of supporting the Avila and KC communities starts with meeting people.

**Jim:** But there's something bigger: We want Avila and its graduates to mean something significant to the Kansas City community. I believe we accomplish this best through partnerships with organizations that share our mission of serving the underserved. There are a lot of us in KC, so finding strong partners won't be difficult. I do believe that - together - we can build something truly extraordinary here at Avila, in and for Kansas City.

Scan for the whole story and a video introduction.



## Avila Celebrates 105th Class; David D. Kerr Awarded Honorary Doctorate

**D**uring commencement exercises on May 14 at Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City, 286 undergraduate and 105 master's degrees were conferred to Avila's 105th graduating class. David Kerr '76 was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, and President Ronald Slepitz, Ph.D., CSJA, was awarded President Emeritus status during the celebration.

By awarding honorary degrees, Avila University recognizes outstanding individuals whose accomplishments are of such excellence that they inspire our graduates. Kerr's level of exemplary achievement was deemed worthy of the singular recognition conveyed by the conferral of an honorary degree.

An Avila University alumnus and a member of the institution's first basketball team, Kerr graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1976 and economics in 1977. He served as an Avila University admissions counselor and the director of financial aid. In 2012, Kerr joined Avila University's Board of Trustees; in 2013, he joined the university's Heritage Society.

Kerr is a passionate advocate of higher education and Avila's founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ). As an inaugural member of the St. Joseph Educational Ministry (SJEM), Kerr works to uphold and share the CSJ charism to ensure the Catholic identity remains strong and present through the mission of Avila University. In his 46-year relationship with Avila University, Kerr has consistently and personally impacted numerous students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members as a devoted and passionate leader of Avila University.



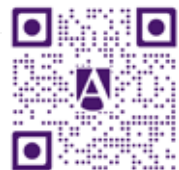




## Simulation Learning Center

At 1,500 square feet, the new hands-on learning facility will be located north of Wylie Hall and equipped with utilities and a separate entrance. The design has been affectionately named the Nursing Village and can be adapted to provide long-term flexibility and house multi-use simulation, debriefing, and classroom flex space.

The story continues here:





# Avila Nursing

## Expanding Program and Footprint

A

Avila University's BSN program was the first accredited in Kansas City and boasts nearly 2,500 active nursing alumni, clinical partnerships with 20 sites in the metro, and an exemplary NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination) pass rate. But the demand for nurses in the Kansas City region and the country continues to grow.

In November 2021, Avila received permission from the Missouri State Board of Nursing to increase enrollment from cohorts of 54 students to 68 students. To accommodate this enrollment opportunity and the need for nurses, Avila will add a second cohort starting spring 2023, construct a new, dedicated lab space, and hire additional full-time faculty in fall 2023. Additionally, a new collaboration with North Kansas City Hospital has added new dedicated clinical sites.

"The expansion of Avila's School of Nursing, both in terms of the number of students and the space needed to provide an exceptional learning environment, further solidifies Avila's long and proud tradition of educating the best nursing professionals in the KC region and beyond," said Angel Yanez, the new chair of Avila School of Nursing.

"We are also investigating and pursuing adding new nursing degree programs at Avila, which I know many alumni are excited to see."

Help us make this project a reality by giving a gift today. Visit [avila.edu/give](https://avila.edu/give), and ensure more Avila trained nurses can impact our communities!

# QUESTIONS answered

## Remy Davenport

Takes Her Shot and Scores

After coaching for three years under Torie Murillo '14, Women's Basketball Assistant Coach Remy Davenport scores the Head Coach position.

### Why is Avila special to you?

Avila is a hidden gem in Kansas City. I love that I'll get the chance to get more people involved in the Avila community. It's a great place to set students up for success academically and athletically.

### What's your background?

I grew up in Blue Springs, Missouri where I attended Blue Springs South. I went to play basketball at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, played for three years there, and earned my BSBA in Marketing. I transferred to Truman State to play my last year of basketball with my younger sister Tiffany, where I earned my Master's in Leadership with an emphasis in Coaching.

Scan for more of the story, including a video introduction to Coach Davenport.



## Matt Carpenter

New Head Coach Takes the Field

Matt Carpenter was recently promoted to Head Coach of Avila's baseball team. Coaching at Avila since 2011 and despite the circumstances, Carpenter is prepared and proud to lead the team.

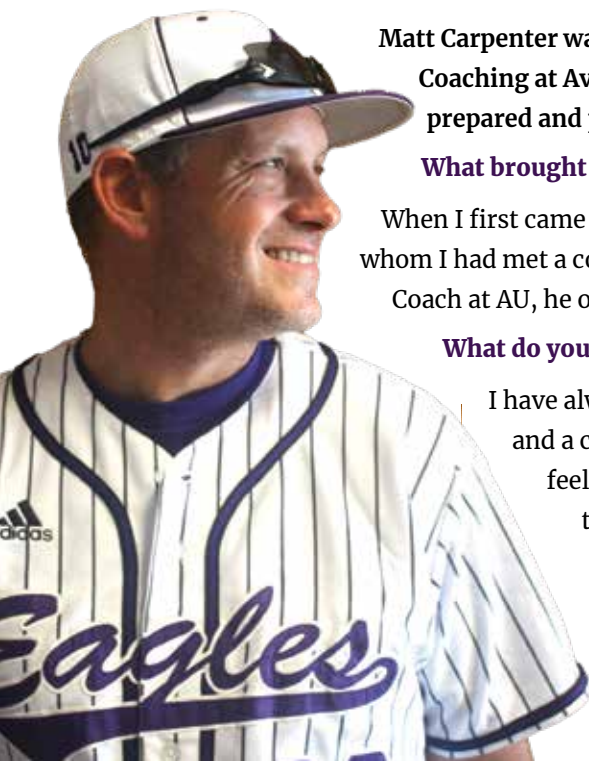
### What brought you to Avila?

When I first came to Avila back in 2011 it was to coach alongside Coach Cronk, whom I had met a couple of years before. When he first became the Head Coach at AU, he offered me a chance to join him and I jumped at the opportunity.

### What do you like about being an Avila Eagle?

I have always loved being an Eagle. There seems to be such a family atmosphere and a closeness among the people that I encounter. I am sure that most people feel that about the university that they are a part of, but I really do feel that the connections here are unique.

Scan for the whole story and a video introduction to Coach Carpenter.



# STEER



## February 4, 2023

Ellen Martin & Alie Scholes, Honorary Chairs  
Tyler '02 & Laura '04 Barr, Event Chairs

Mark your calendars for the 47th annual Steer Dinner & Auction on Saturday, February 4, 2023. This tradition is Avila's largest fundraiser raising vital scholarship funds for current and future students.

Registration and sponsorship opportunities will open soon! Tickets are \$250 per person, all alumni have a discounted ticket price of \$200. Contact the Advancement Office with any questions at [SteerDinner@avila.edu](mailto:SteerDinner@avila.edu) or 816.501.3780.





Scan to view the  
schedule & register!



Let the  
SO

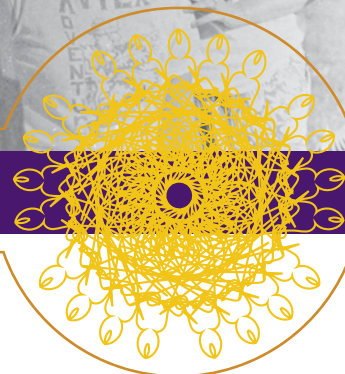
## HOMECOMING WEEKEND 2022:



# Good Times HAPPY!



SEPTEMBER 29 – OCTOBER 2



Homecoming weekend is September 29 – October 2 and you won't want to miss this year! Everyone is invited to a special Meet the President Reception to kick off the weekend on Thursday, September 29!

We'll also be celebrating with Dinner Theatre, Awards Ceremonies, 50-Year Reunion Dinner for the class of 1972 and the football tailgate.





# [CLASS notes

1964

'64 **Kathleen Hegarty Thorne** completed her eighth book. The last literary venture focused on the Irish War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War in Ireland. The new book, *Boots on the Heather*, chronicles events in County Mayo from 1920 to 1923.

1977

'77 **Linda (LaBounty) Lieffring** retired from full-time nursing practice. She is still doing part-time practice teaching Childbirth Education in the Healthy Arrivals program. She has worked part-time for more than 30 years and her full-time job for the last 21 years. "I love being a Nurse and am proud to be an Avila Nurse since 1977 when I graduated with my BSN."

1981

'81 **Mike Baechle** retired in May after 25 years at Mastercard in St. Louis.

1996

'96 **Angela (Fisher) Danley** recently accepted the Director of Clinical and Field-Based Experiences position at Avila University.

2004

'04 **Lucas Wiester** started as an academic support specialist helping nursing, sonography, and biomedical students at Bryan College of Health Science.

2007

'07 **Jill Montgomery** married Joseph Kassens on Feb. 2, 2022.

2009

① '09 **Veronica (Pilshaw) Goetz** and her husband Rob welcomed their first son, Hudson Andrew, on March 9, 2022.

2010

② '10 **Banen Chaney** welcomed her first child, Maizie Jo, on June 30 weighing eight pounds and 10 ounces.

'10 **Emilee (Bilyeu) Rehling** started a new job with Real Chemistry and supports Data Science and Integrated Intelligence.





## 2011

'11 Josh Parisse was promoted to the Vice President for Enrollment Management for Avila University.

## 2012

③ '12, '15 Sara Boatwright & '12 MJ Bland were united in marriage on June 10, 2022.

'12 Josh Hewitt recently became the Director of Football Equipment for Brigham Young University.

④ '12 Tim Wolf and his wife Juliette welcomed their second son, Parker, on June 11. He joins big brother Clayton, almost two.

## 2014

'14 Torie Murillo recently became the Head Women's Basketball Coach for Baker University.

# CLASS

## notes cont'd

### 2015

**5** '15, '17 **Jasmine (Colhour) Heslinga** married Adam Heslinga on June 11, 2022.

### 2016

'16 **Brandon Calloway** was awarded among the 2022 NextGen Leaders in Kansas City.

**6** '16 **Elizabeth Olinger** and '16 **Patrick Moore** were united in marriage on July 2, 2022.

'16, '18 **Ben Walker** recently accepted the position of Talent Acquisition Consultant for UMB Bank.

### 2017

**7** '17 **McKayla (Wilbanks) Polen** married in Sept. 2021.

### 2018

'18 **Kenny Baker** was promoted to Director of Admissions for Avila University after serving as an Admission Representative.

'18, '20 **Hannah Masters** is now the Director of Financial Aid at Cottey College, in Nevada MO. She also serves on the Executive Board of the Missouri Association of Student Financial Aid Personnel (MASFAP).







## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Submitting a class note is easy!  
Scan here to be featured  
in the next issue of AVILA  
alumni magazine.



## 2019

'19, '20 **Sara Scott** earned her Master in Occupational Therapy degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She will be serving the Gardner Edgerton School District starting the 22-23 school year!

## 2020

8 '20 **Christina Boxx** is a graduate student at KSU. Out of thousands of distance education students, she was nominated & selected as the 2022 recipient of the Extraordinary Student of the Year Award.

9 '20, **Veronica (DeFeo) Stone** wed Jaellan Stone on Sept. 26, 2021. The couple resides in Kansas City, MO. Veronica recently took on a new role as a Content Writer for Procore Technologies.



# [IN memoriam

To make a gift in memory  
of a friend or loved one,  
please scan:



'51 **Helen (Bessenbacher) Colwell** of Kansas City, Missouri passed away on May 24, 2022. Colwell earned her bachelor's in sociology from the College of St. Teresa.

'61 **Anne (Wilkins) Billings** of Dayton, Ohio passed away on April 25, 2022. Billings earned her bachelor's in education from the College of St. Teresa.

'63 **Suzanne (Becker) Chelesnik** of Solana Beach, California passed away on June 12, 2022. Chelesnik attended the College of St. Teresa.

'67 **Linda (Lewis) Reaby** of Australia passed away on March 24, 2022. Reaby earned her bachelor's in nursing from Avila College.

'82 **David Ramsey** of Kansas City, Missouri passed away on May 16, 2022. Ramsey earned his bachelor's in management science from Avila College.

'86 **Sara (Langsford) Paige** of Honolulu, Hawaii passed away on April 21, 2022. Paige earned her bachelor's in music from Avila College.

Avila University will be hosting an **All Saints Day Mass** on Tuesday, November 1 at 4 p.m. in the Orscheln Memorial Chapel in Foyle Hall. As part of Month of Remembrance, we invite you to this special mass.

# From Homebody to Risk-Taker:

## A Tale of a Serial Educator



Growing up in South Kansas City, Tracy Henrichson Carlson '76 always considered herself a homebody. She never ventured far from home, and enrolled at Avila primarily because it was in the neighborhood. She knew she wanted to be a teacher, and that Avila had a strong education program. Little did she know that this seemingly simple decision would change her life.

During her years at Avila, Tracy became friends with classmates from different cities and backgrounds, which sparked a desire to venture beyond Kansas City. Upon graduation, Tracy accepted a position with the Kansas City Missouri public schools, but that post was short-lived. She by chance saw an advertisement for teachers to work on Native American reservations. Emboldened by her new network of college friends and her passion for education, she accepted a position on an Arizona reservation. For someone who had never left home, this was a huge step. Tracy hopped in her car and never looked back.

Tracy's nearly 50-year career in special education spanned tribal schools, public schools and Catholic schools throughout central and southern Arizona, as a teacher, counselor and consultant. She has retired three times, but always returns to her calling in education. "Maybe this time it will stick!" she remarked about her most recent retirement.

Tracy credits Avila for her passion for education and serving those in need. "I was able to teach all grades with confidence, from Kindergarten through high school, because of the broad coursework offered by Avila. The Education Department was so wonderful, as well as the Psychology Department, where I learned various counseling strategies."

As a way to give back to Avila and help foster the passion of future teachers, Tracy is funding the *Tracy Henrichson Carlson '76 Scholarship* in her estate plans. With a bequest in her trust, Tracy has named Avila to create a scholarship for those students majoring in Special Education. "The world needs more Avila-trained teachers."



For ways you can ensure your legacy at Avila University:

Scan the QR code or contact Amy Drouin, senior director of development and planned giving, at 816.501.3727 or [amy.drouin@avila.edu](mailto:amy.drouin@avila.edu)





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**Add your experiences to an Avila history project.**

Avila University has received a CIC NetVue grant, “Reframing the Institutional Saga” to research, preserve and compile a history of the University.

“Our lack of a cohesive institutional history limits the ability to leverage our rich heritage and strong ties to the Sisters of St. Joseph in demonstrating our shared vocational identity to faculty, staff, and students,” said Carol Coburn, Ph.D., professor emerita and project research coordinator on the grant. This two-year project is in the early stages, and it is now we need your personal experiences of your time at Avila University/College of St. Teresa. Your photographs, memorabilia, documents, and first-person stories will join our existing University Archives collection and help tell Avila’s story.

Please visit the Archives website ([Avila.edu/avila-archives](http://Avila.edu/avila-archives)) to learn more about what types of documents we’re seeking and how you can contribute.

Scan this QR for archives donation information.

